

BOOK REVIEWS.

DEVILS: BIBLE VERSUS PAGAN, OR THE PROBLEM OF EVIL. By H. R. Bender, D.D. Illustrated. Published by the author, Harrisburg, Pa. [1918.] Pp. x + 150.

The book under review is composed of two parts, the first of which was originally published under the title *The Bible Devil*. This has been here reprinted without change, but to satisfy the questions "of Bible teachers who desired information upon many points that did not come within the compass of the first edition" (p. 71), a second part has been added under what is now the title of the whole book. There are twelve chapters under sundry headings, such as Teaching of the Old Testament, Devils or Demons, The Pagan Devil, The Problem of Evil, Prevalence of Dualism in the Days of Christ, Paul's "Thorn in the Flesh," etc.

The aim of the author is to establish the purely monotheistic character of the Christian religion, which, as he clearly perceives, is somehow punctured by the doctrine of the Devil. He claims that the traditional conception of the Devil as a "personality" is not Biblical at all but is fashioned after Milton's creation. Says he (pp. 76f) :

"The dualistic teaching of the pagans seems to have come back, or to have been revived within the Church. All contrasts between the Bible and the pagan Devil disappeared; and the pagan Devil, as a fiendish, supernatural personality, clothed with the attributes of a rival Deity, became the popular faith, whose harvest was the witch mania that overran Europe like a pestilence of darkness. Under the invisible pressure of this popular conviction, our King James translation of the Scriptures appeared. Milton gave the pagan conception of the Devil respectability, and the King James translation gave it authority. Not until the Revised Version of the Scriptures appeared were these old implications of dualism taken seriously. Since then, in thought centers the old conviction of a personal, supernatural, historical Devil no longer exists."

To justify these contentions, all references in the Bible to "The Adversary," "Satan," "The Devil," etc., must be explained away. Thus we read on page 27:

"The Adversary in Job symbolizes an accusing attorney at court, in harmony with Asiatic custom. The Adversary is not the ruler of a kingdom, located in a dark underworld. He has no distinctive hideousness, nor in any sense is he a rival ruler, set against the Kingdom of God; nor is he a fallen angel. He assembles with the Sons of God; is not reproved for being out of place, and is entirely subject to Divine authority. He acts only by Divine permission, in order that, by a severe test, the possibility of an unselfish devotion to righteousness may be made manifest."

The story of the Temptation of Christ is, of course, incapable of literal interpretation—these temptations are "visions." But we may gently remind the author that a narrative of visions of a Tempter presupposes belief in the existence of this Tempter—or else it is fiction. The same line of argument is continued in the second part of the book, where we find the first serious discussion of the New Testament stories of demons cast out by Jesus. To quote the author's words (pp. 125f) : "Also, what we now call hypnotism, telepathy, and clairvoyance, as psychic forces of human life, the Old World attributed

to the action of demons, resident in the bodies of men....The wisdom of Christ is apparent in his custom of meeting the multitude on their own ground. The only method of progress was to drive the demons out of their minds, by healing them of their maladies....Accordingly, Jesus rebukes the devil or demon *as though* he were a person." (The italics are ours.)

However, a belated study of the *Avesta* leads the author, after all, "to conclude that there existed a strong disposition in the people toward dualism" after the Exile (p. 103), and he even admits that in the days of Christ the Jewish masses, "cursed by the Pharisees, and then wandering abroad as sheep without a shepherd" (p. 120), had become imbued with the spirit of dualism, in spite of the teaching of their Prophets. Now, it is a well-established fact that the religion of the ancient Jews originally knew nothing of the Devil, that *God* tempted David to do wrong, etc., etc. But the other fact is just as well established that it was the very study of the Bible, revived by the Reformation, that led the people of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as their spiritual leaders to that insane fear of the Devil and his servants which characterizes the private and public life of the whole age. The fact is, there *is* a Devil in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, and if that doctrine is proven to be illogical, to be inconsistent with the doctrine of monotheism, this argues nothing in favor of Christian theology in general. It simply shows that the Devil is making himself so obnoxious in modern Bible interpretation that he must be got rid of at almost any price.

Finally, even if we discard all dualistic teaching of the Bible, what is thereby gained? A more logical system, to be sure, but the problem of evil, figuring in the title of Dr. Bender's book, remains as unsolved as ever, simply because theology cannot solve it. The best the author has to offer in this respect is the time-worn *theory of contrast*: "If we shrink in horror at man's capacity for brutal degradation, it is that we may better appreciate the outcome of man's redemption" (p. 130). Notice, besides, that here—unconsciously, we take it—for "the evil outside of man," the "moral evil within man" has been substituted. Such solutions of the greatest ethical problem there is will satisfy nobody who is not contented to cover up the defects of this best of all possible worlds with platitudes and sophistry.

We do not doubt that the book will be read with interest by ministers and Sunday-school teachers.